



Sierra Nevada Conservancy
11521 Blocker Drive, Suite 205
Auburn, CA 95603
ATTN: Theresa Parsley

September 18, 2018

Re: COMMENT LETTER – DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

Cc: Ellie Cohen, President and CEO, Point Blue Conservation Science
Grant Ballard, Chief Science Officer, Point Blue Conservation Science

Dear Theresa,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your Draft Strategic Plan 2019-2024. Point Blue Conservation Science is glad to see the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) expand its strategic focus beyond forests to encompass broader watershed health and resilience, including the importance of protecting and restoring Sierra meadows and using fire for watershed restoration. We are also glad to see the inclusion of the Strategic Lands Conserved goal, recognizing the important role that land trusts and private land conservation can play in reaching broader goals around watershed health and resiliency. We are excited to partner with you to help realize this new strategic focus.

Our specific comments aim to bring increased attention to the ways in which climate adaptation can be elevated and integrated into watershed restoration and strategic land conservation as well as the potential for land conservation to contribute to WIP goals by catalyzing restoration projects on private lands.

We offer the following comments on the Healthy Watersheds and Forests goal:

1. Restoration activities should be designed in the context of a changing climate to ensure restored ecosystems are resilient to climate impacts. We recommend that the SNC support efforts to design and test climate-smart restoration approaches. We suggest the following be included under Strategy 8: Support research and partnerships to design, test, and evaluate climate-smart restoration approaches aimed at enhancing the ecological function of degraded ecosystems in a manner that prepares them for the consequences of climate change.
2. Acquisition of conservation easements can be used to catalyze restoration on private land through several mechanisms. Climate-smart conservation easements can include provisions allowing for ecological management and restoration to be implemented by the landowner, land trust, or other conservation partner. Through partnerships and funding, land trusts can link landowners with the technical assistance and financial resources necessary to improve private land management. As a result, we suggest the following be included under Strategy 10: Prioritize

funding for conservation easements that include provisions and opportunities for ecological restoration and long-term management.

We offer the following comments on the Strategic Lands Conserved goal:

1. We recommend that the goal description include more emphasis on prioritizing private land conservation projects that include opportunities for active management and restoration to enhance multiple benefits and increase climate adaptation. Solely focusing on protecting high-benefit, high-risk lands may result in properties being overlooked that could provide important ecological benefits after restoration or management actions (e.g., wet meadows). Similarly, lands at high risk from climate impacts or other stressors will require long-term stewardship. As a result, we suggest that SNC prioritize private land conservation projects that include restoration and active management components. Our additional comments below provide suggestions of language to integrate these recommendations into the strategies.
2. Land trusts are well positioned to integrate climate adaptation into private land conservation and use conservation easements to catalyze active management and restoration on private lands. We suggest the following language be included under Strategy 4: Work with land trusts and other conservation partners to design and test new climate-smart approaches to private land conservation, including but not limited to conservation easement agreements with provisions allowing for active management and ecological restoration, multi-benefit management plans, and long-term ecological monitoring programs to evaluate success.
3. Successful private land conservation requires dedicated, long-term funding sources to support stewardship and restoration activities on lands protected by conservation easements and fee title properties held by land trusts. There is a need to build technical capacity and funding sources to support land trusts and conservation easement landowners in stewardship activities, especially those designed to increase resilience in the face of climate change. As such, we suggest the following be included under Strategy 2: Establish and implement a grant program to provide land trusts with funding to support long-term stewardship obligations and provide conservation easement landowners with funding and technical assistance for active management and restoration; examples include funding for management planning, stewardship implementation, and ecological monitoring.
4. When establishing grant criteria to fund land trust acquisitions, we suggest that you require or at least strongly encourage (i.e., reward with a higher ranking) conservation easement and fee title projects to include a land management and monitoring plan that identifies actions to increase climate adaptation and carbon sequestration. The goals and metrics in the management and monitoring plan should be explicitly linked to the conservation values listed in the easement. Similarly, we suggest that you consider prioritizing for funding not only the highest quality and most resilient properties but also those properties with the most potential to become so with restoration and management. These could represent the greatest return on investment and contribute to achieving WIP goals.

We offer the following comments under the Impactful Regional Identity goal:

1. Engaging and educating local communities about the connection between the health of the Sierra Nevada and the health of their local communities is essential to achieving regional goals.

In addition, we see a need and opportunity to engage, recruit, and train the next generation of Sierra Nevada stewards from within our local Sierra Nevada communities. We recommend including a new strategy under Developing Partnerships and Resources to address this need. The following is some suggested language: Work with partners to conduct outreach, education, and training to help identify and recruit a new generation of natural resource managers and stewards from within Sierra Nevada communities.

2. Communicating to the public and decision makers about the importance of watershed management, restoration, and the use of prescribed and managed fire is essential to gain widespread support for these important activities. Public perceptions and support for these activities likely play an important role in shaping the opinions of decision-makers and resulting policies. Sharing information and success stories about restoration activities to the public can help increase support for and understanding of such projects. As such, we recommend that the following bullet be added under Strategy 8: Work with partners to develop and implement targeted outreach strategies to educate the public about the importance of watershed management, restoration, and the use of fire as a tool to increase watershed resilience, protect human communities, and provide important ecosystem services such as water quality improvements and carbon sequestration.

Finally, we commend the SNC for providing a well thought out strategy around measuring success and reporting on progress towards regional resilience. Because of the importance of the Sierra Nevada region's natural resources and resiliency to local communities and the local economy, we encourage the SNC to also develop indicators to help measure progress in reaching desired social and economic outcomes in addition to indicators around ecological health and resilience.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We look forward to working with the SNC to advance plan implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ryan Burnett", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ryan Burnett
Sierra Nevada Group Director
Point Blue Conservation Science